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A marshal with a very martial air

By LARRY SUTTON

This is the story of Michael Flannery, the grand marshal in today's St. Patrick's Day Parade. Let's begin with an excerpt from his 1982 trial on charges of gunrunning for Northern Ireland rebels:

Prosecution: And, sir, is it important that you tell the truth? Is that part of the values that you hold dear?

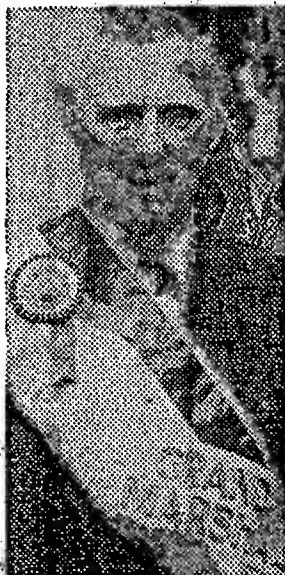
Flannery: It's important that I tell the truth, but propaganda is another thing.... Sometimes it is not political to tell the truth and it is not a lie when that occurs.... It is not always proper to tell the truth.

Which simply means that it may not be enough to take the tales of Michael Flannery with a grain of salt. You may have to use the entire shaker.

Flannery was acquitted of charges that he supplied a friend with \$17,000 to purchase weapons for the outlawed Irish Republican Army. He convinced the jury that he believed the money was going to a CIA operative.

But he has never denied his feelings for the IRA, an organization he joined as a 14-year-old student at Mount Saint Joseph's Trappist Monastery in County Tipperary, Ireland.

The fervor can be traced to his childhood. "There were seven of us in the family," Flannery recalled the other day. "My three brothers were much older and they didn't want a young kid hanging around when they played their games. I couldn't play with



Michael Flannery

them. I would be told to run home."

At home Flannery read. "I became very interested in history, Irish history," he said.

He describes his teenage IRA experience as "life

on the run." He will gladly tell you about his participation in IRA raids on British strongholds.

"We attacked the barracks in a flying column," he says. "There was shooting on both sides, of course, and sometimes it would go on for four or five hours. Sometimes we had to burn the British out. We would drop petrol—you call it gasoline here—and then ignite it. They had no recourse but to leave the building."

FLANNERY WAS CAPTURED in 1922 and spent 18 months in jail. The Irish civil war ended in 1923 with a divided Ireland—a situation Flannery could not accept. So he left the country in 1927, arriving in New York on St. Valentine's Day, to gather support for the IRA from the thousands of immigrants already here.

Working for a united Ireland has always been Flannery's main interest. In 1969 he founded the Irish Action Committee, which would soon become the Irish Northern Aid Committee, "specifically to help (the) distressed and those whose breadwinners were in prison" in Northern Ireland.

It was on the evening of June 18, 1981 that Flannery turned over \$17,000 in \$100 bills to friend and fellow IRA supporter George Harrison.

The money was eventually turned over to an undercover FBI agent in exchange for 42 automatic rifles, submachine guns and handguns. And on the morning of Oct. 1, 1981, FBI agents arrested Flannery as he left morning Mass.

It was during the trial in Brooklyn Federal Court that Flannery's more militant side surfaced. Listen to these excerpts from his testimony:

Prosecution: Sir, being a pacifist by nature, do you support, sir, the killing of British soldiers in Ireland?

Flannery: In Ireland, yes. They should not be there in the first place. What are they doing in Ireland, only killing, robbing them and raping.

Prosecution: Do you support the bombings that are committed by the IRA in London against civilian population, sir? Do you support that?

Flannery: Well, in a sense I do. If they are bombing and blowing down Belfast and other parts of Northern Ireland, I think they should get a touch of it themselves to realize what it is. Bombing is an awful thing but there are no other means of doing it.

Prosecution: So basically, your feeling is that all means have been exhausted and that in your pacifist beliefs anything goes, is that correct?

Flannery: Yes. We have tried everything but our prayers and tears were stopped.